

Narrative by: Lt. (jg) R. F. Kip, USNR
Ensign P. K. Lundberg, USNR
USS FREDERICK C. DAVIS, DE 136

Lieutenant Porter:

This is the 25th of May 1945. We are in the Office of Naval Records and Library and this is Lieutenant Porter introducing Ensign P. K. Lundberg, U.S.N.R., of the DE FREDERICK C. DAVIS.

Ensign Lundberg:

The morning of the 24th of April 1945, the DAVIS was steaming in line with a number of other DEs about 400 miles northwest of the Azores, on what amounted to a large barrier sweep of the central part of the north Atlantic for the purpose of picking up, intercepting, a large number of German U-boats which were known to have been coming across the Atlantic towards the States. The watch on the DAVIS had been relieved at 0745 that morning, the sea was fairly rough and on this day, as on many others, the crew was more or less sleeping in, as many as were not on watch and for that reason our casualties were not as great as they might have been.

The submarine was picked up at about 0830 that morning and the Officer of the Deck, after he had told the Captain of the contact, gave right standard rudder and went after the submarine. As we understand it the submarine skipper was trying to get through our screen of ships in order to get at what he thought would be a carrier. He thought we were screening something, and we came around, he saw us coming around, or he must have heard us or something, at any rate he decided that it was either us or him and so he took us.

The torpedo was fired at a range of about 650 yards from our port bow and it hit at 0840 the time at which I was asleep personally, and it hit about frame 61, which is in the B-1, which is the forward engine room. Now, that explosion which resulted was seen to blast through both sides of the ship, both port and starboard sides, and the explosion went up all the way through the bridge area. After that quite a pall of smoke was seen to go up. The mast fell down and a large number of people apparently were killed instantly, especially in the bridge area.

Mr. Kip, Mr. Anderson and myself, were sleeping back aft. We woke up, got out of the passage there. We began digging down doors back aft. We didn't

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knew exactly where the damage was, from the way the ship was tilting we realized that she was going down rather quickly, so we went up topside and from my first impression up there was it just didn't seem possible that this thing had happened to us. But the ship had caved down right in the middle there, was going, sinking down rather rapidly and we all began checking depth charges.

There were quite a few men running around, putting over life rafts, life nets, and finally after, oh, I'd say about nine minutes, the water had come up to the end of the deck house there and it was necessary for us to go over the side. I stepped into the water, I imagine it was about two feet from the deck to the water, the place that I went off and I swam out to one of the life rafts.

It was rather crowded at the time. We had to take turns holding onto the raft, and we had quite a bit of difficulty holding onto these rafts because they have just handles for a man to get himself on these rafts with.

Finally one of the depth charges went off. I was in the water at the time, and I had a rather severe pain in my stomach, it felt as if my insides were being twisted around, but that was the only charge that we felt.

After that we more or less hung onto the raft until we got to within safety. Just as the ship was coming alongside us to pick us up, I more or less fainted or something, a thing which happened to a lot of men when they realized they were near safety and the next thing I knew, I was in a bunk on the USS HAYTER, which picked most of our men up.

Now we have a lot of information which we've gotten second hand from interviewing the members of our crew and as such we can't be sure that it is accurate in all details but from what we know, the crew back aft, in the after living spaces, got out almost unharmed. A large number of men were sleeping back aft at the time. They were able to get up, abandon ship. There were no orders given over the public address system; all the officers on the bridge were killed immediately, apparently. We tried to organize things a little bit back aft but the ship was going down so fast that we weren't able to accomplish anything other than a rather hasty setting of water tight integrity back aft and checking the depth charges. I think that's all just for now.

Lieutenant Porter:

Mr. Lundberg, what was your position on board ship?

Ensign Lundberg:

I was the Assistant First Lieutenant and Damage Control Officer. It is my regret that we couldn't do more in the way of damage control on that ship than we did. We were always afraid of getting hit by an acoustic torpedo between our propellers and those of us who slept back aft were always wondering about that and every night we went to bed we had to more or less pray ourselves to sleep, but we were all surprised that the torpedo hit where it did.

We'd made all our plans, more or less, to take a torpedo aft. We were pretty sure we could save the ship if that happened, but the ship was not at GQ at the time it was struck, most of the center compartments flooded very quickly, and the ship just went down, we had to leave it in about nine minutes and it sunk in about 15 or 17 minutes.

Lieutenant Porter:

Was this a wakeless torpedo or was it seen before it hit the ship as far as you've heard?

Ensign Lundberg:

No report was made of anyone seeing the torpedo. In addition we had the sound gear trained right on the submarine at a range of 550 yards, bearing about 080 true which is on our port bow, and the sound man who would have heard and reported noises if he had heard any, just didn't hear any. He suffered considerable loss of memory, he's a survivor, but he remembers that he didn't hear any torpedo noises. We were handicapped quite a bit by the presence of fox-dog gear, which more or less fouled up our reception on the sound gear.

The torpedo was apparently a very large one, because the blast effect was terrific. It blew the Officer of the Deck all the way off the flying bridge, way up in the air and over the front of the sound shack down to number two gun. We didn't know what happened to the Captain, he may have been blown clear into the water as was the messenger who was on watch up on the bridge, but Mr. Minard who was down in CIC was the only man who got out of there alive. He was leaning over the DRT at the time and apparently didn't go up the way everybody else must of to hit the ceiling. He was knocked out and barely got off the ship. The water was up to the level of the signal bridge, which must be 25 feet above the water, when he got off.

Very few men got off the forward part of the ship. The hedge hog crew was standing by to fire hedge hogs at 0840 when the torpedo hit, but the torpedo got us before we could get the submarine and these men on the hedge hogs, led by Mr. Downing, who unfortunately did not survive the experience in the water, they were able to rescue several men from the forward part of the first platform deck. They also went in and tried to flood one of the magazines by controls which were located near the ward room. They were unable to do this. They noticed that the wardroom was completely full of flames, they heard no sounds in there. Apparently everybody in the wardroom was killed instantaneously. Golay, who was our Carpenter's Mate on board, went past the wardroom, looked in, he couldn't see much but smoke, but he did notice that the deck was blown half way up to the overhead.

Hancock, our Boatswain's Mate, and probably the ruggedest man on the ship, was down in the mess hall, after mess hall at the time the torpedo hit, and that was only one compartment away from where the torpedo did strike. He miraculously was blown up the hatch, got out somehow and got over the side, was able to swim with the aid of some of his comrades, notably Exstain, who

did not survive, they got to the USS FLAMERTY, I believe. Hancock was in rather bad shape. He was the most severely injured of our men that did survive.

Most of our injuries were leg injuries and head injuries. A man would have his legs rather severely compressed, broken and then go up and hit the overhead, and for that reason, I'm afraid that a lot of men never came to, they never knew what hit them, literally.

Lieutenant Porter:

Do you mind spelling the name of some of these people you've mentioned, the office in CIC, and the man with the hedge hogs, and the others?

Ensign Lundeborg:

Mr. Downing was the officer in charge of the hedge hogs. His name is spelled D O W N I N G. Mr. Minard, M I N E R D, was plotting in CIC, as was Mr. Astrin, A S T R I N. He did not survive the blast apparently. The Captain, Lieutenant James R. Crosby, C R O S B Y, was on the flying bridge, as was Lieutenant (jg) Mc Whorter, M C W H O R T E R. He was the officer that was blown down to the number two gun. The other officers apparently were all down in the wardroom at the time and must have been killed instantly.

Bontsman's Mate Hancock, his name is spelled H A N C O C K. The Carpenter's Mate who saw the wardroom was Gelay, G O L A Y. One of the Chiefs coming out of Chief's quarters, incidentally, none of the Chiefs survived that blast with the exception of Chief Collins, C O L L I N S, the Gunner's Mate Chief, he got out of the Chiefs' quarters, had to go up a red hot ladder through an escape scuttle and he also saw the condition of the wardroom there.

Lieutenant Porter:

Did the ship go down in the form of a "Y"?

Ensign Lundeborg:

Yes sir, it broke in really two places. One about frame 61, that was where the torpedo apparently hit, and that's where it must have broken in two.

We believe the torpedo was going at about a depth of ten feet. We didn't have a draft of more than 13 feet at the most and apparently hit right about the keel there, the ship collapsed right in the center. There were also large cracks about frame 100 which was near the passageway, the mid-ship passageway there. I can't understand that, but Hancock who got out of the after mess hall remembered a number of details. He said that the bulkheads to the forward engine room were blown even, he could see in there, he could see through the deck which had been blown up and down into the CIC room. He saw oil rushing out of the diesel oil overflow pipes. There were fires down there immediately. He saw a number of the mess cooks try to go up the port hatch but apparently they were killed right after that. He somehow was blown up the starboard

ladder there. We had no survivors from the living compartment forward of that. One of the men that was cleaning quite away up forward in the crew's head, had locked the door and was inside of the head. The door was blown off it's hinges and he managed to get out of there, but you can see that the blast was very terrific all throughout that part of the ship. I think one of the reasons that blast didn't effect us anymore aft was that we had expansion joints at about frame 51 and about frame 90 on DEs, and I think they took quite a bit of the shock. The men in the after living compartments, some of them were thrown out of their casks, but I think they were able to get up topside without much difficulty.

Lt. Porter:

Was this raft you got on a floater raft?

Ensign Lundberg:

Yes sir. It was a floater raft. We didn't have any trouble. The boys were very calm. We had one injured man, Williams, W I L L I A M S, P. B., he was an engineer, but the boys were all very calm, and they weren't upset too badly by the depth charge explosion. We were able to get the rescue, I think we were rescued in about a half hour, maybe a little bit longer. Some of the boys on the other rafts got hysterical. In some cases the rafts were turned over. Of course one or two men were lost at those times. All the men were in rather weakened condition by that time. They had periods when they'd just lose consciousness entirely, and at that time it was very easy for them to float away, especially if their other comrades were out, too. We know from the reports from the other ships that there were some sharks around there, we didn't realize it at the time because the temperature of the water is about 55 degrees and we were fairly confident that we'd be picked up as we saw these other DEs plowing around there in the sea heading for us. We didn't know how long they'd be. We just hoped they wouldn't have to drop any charges near us.

Lieutenant Porter:

Were any of the men hurt by any of the depth charges which you said went off.

Ensign Lundberg:

I'm afraid that possibly some of them were killed by it, but as we can figure it out, it was a depth charge that broke loose from its arbor and sank down to about 800 feet and then went off not because of any depth setting, but because a charge like that will go off at that depth anyway, due to the pressure on the hull, on the outside of the ash can.

We didn't like the feeling of it especially. A number of us had, I think we had minor internal injuries, those of the survivors, but I didn't hear of anybody that did survive having a great deal of trouble with that.

Lieutenant Kip:

This is Mr. Kip, the Division Radio Specialist Officer, speaking.

I'd just been aboard the DAVIS for a week. I'd gone over to fix some radar gear and hadn't become acquainted with the ship yet and it was quite a surprise to me when we got torpedoed. The morning of the 24th of April I was asleep back aft with Mr. Lundberg and Mr. Anderson, had a long mid-watch the night before, nobody had come back to wake us up.

At 0840 the torpedo hit. Back in the after quarters, the doors came out of the cabinets, there was a great deal of broken glass around, all the lights were out, and it was rather difficult to orient yourself at first. I don't know how long it would have taken me, but fortunately Mr. Lundberg knew where the door was and he made a bee-line for it.

I stepped out into the passageway and saw Mr. Lundberg and other members of the repair party dogging down hatches. I was just dressed in my scivvy shirt and shorts myself, so I decided I'd better go back and put something warmer on. One of the repair party, Moon, an Electrician's Mate had a flashlight so we went back together into the after quarters and I picked up some underwear, and so on.

I went topside and there didn't seem to be any chance of saving the ship at all. It was broken in the center and appeared to be sinking fast. There was not a great deal of panic back on the fantail, a few badly wounded men came back there. Their faces were blackened from being burned, but as I remember most of them had life jackets on and they'd been taken care of by the rest of the crew.

We realized that at the time if one of the depth charges went off it would mean the end of everybody, so some of us stayed back and checked the depth charges. We were engaged in this when the ship took a sudden lurch and started to become more and more vertical.

I was afraid that the ship was going to turn upside down on us, so I went over the side. I swam to a raft and found Mr. Lundberg on it with quite a few other men. There were a couple of wounded men on it, and there wasn't very much room, so I moved onto a floater net on which there was only one man. Just as I reached the floater net one of the depth charges went off, so this other man, Carpenter, and myself climbed up on the floater net.

We stayed on the floater net for about 15 minutes, then one of the other ships in the division came through the area of the survivors as if they were intending to pick us up. They fired empty depth charge cases to which were attached lines, the object being that the lines would be thrown out from the ship about 300 feet and that the survivors could get one and be pulled to the ship. Just as they fired those empty depth charge cases, however, they picked up sound contact on the U-boat so they had to go in on the attack.

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The next ship that came to pick up the survivors was the HAYTER. The HAYTER hove to and started to drift down on us and when it got close enough I tried to make a swim for it. I got to the HAYTER, they threw me a life ring and I put my arm through the life ring and was hoisted to the deck and that's all I remember until I woke up in a bunk in the wardroom shaking very much from shock but otherwise feeling fine. The HAYTER's crew, as I remember, were very, very kind and very, very hospitable. They did everything they possibly could for us, cheering us up and helping us along with a dose of brandy here and there, and it wasn't long before most of the survivors had recovered to normal.

The HAYTER gave up two whole compartments of the crew's quarters to the survivors. All the survivors were back there recuperating. Some of them quite badly wounded. I remember there were some men on the HAYTER who had no previous experience in first aid but who were doing an excellent job in administering blood plasma to the wounded. I also have to give a great deal of credit to Doctor McKay, the doctor aboard the HAYTER, who worked to the limit of his capacity to save the men who were badly wounded and who were dying.

My name is R. F. Kip, K-I-P, the doctor on the HAYTER is Doctor M-C-K-I-Y.

Shortly after the DAVIS was torpedoed the FLAHERTY picked up sound contact on the submarine. The submarine made all sorts of evasive tactics and sank to a depth of 800 feet. At this depth sound contact was very poor, echoes were blurry, not well defined and it was a very difficult job to make attacks on her. Every kind of attack known to the Atlantic Fleet was made and a couple of new ones too.

Straight attacks were made with magnetic charges, creeping attacks were made with one ship, two ships, and three ships in a line. It was sort of like a football game where you have three or four first teams. Two ships would work on the submarine and when they had expended their depth charges or were exhausted two more ships would be called in. I believe there were 13 ships waiting to work on that submarine.

During one attack some of the magnetic charges went off and had the desired effect on the submarine. Although they did not injure it critically they were able to open up the seams, cause leaks and so cripple the submarine that it had to come to a shallower depth of 200 feet. When it reached the depth of 200 feet the FLAHERTY made a hedge hog run on the sub and was able to hit the forward compartments with a hedge hog. This flooded the forward compartments and the submarine had to come to the surface. The survivors on the submarine, I understand, abandoned ship before the submarine reached the surface, they came up to the surface in monkey lugs. As soon as the submarine reached the surface it was engaged with very heavy gunfire by as many ships in the division as possible who had a clear bearing on which to fire on.

This firing continued until the submarine sank. The survivors of the submarine were rescued by various ships in the division and were taken into port to be interrogated.

Lieutenant Porter:

Can you identify the submarine?

Lieutenant Kip:

Yes, that submarine was the U-545.

Lieutenant Porter:

Did the HAYTER have any part in the sinking?

Lieutenant Kip:

No sir, she had no part in the sinking. She spent all her time rescuing survivors. She was in quite a bit of danger in doing this. She hove to and had no motion on and she would have been a very easy target for a torpedo. At one time they did believe that a torpedo had been fired. The FLAHERTY reported over TBS, "Stand by for a torpedo". The HAYTER, at this point was just rescuing survivors from the water, and some of her survivors had quite a rough time of it temporarily when some of the rescuing party were in a great rush to reach their battle stations. They just dropped the survivors where they were and headed for their battle stations.

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